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Radio remains the place to discover music

Andrew Fryer, Dean of the School of Film, Music and Performing Arts, Leeds Beckett University

With the UK music industry out-performing the wider economy over the last 4 years, an 11% rise in employment in the sector and five of the top-10 selling artists in the world coming from the UK last year – Adele, Ed Sheeran, One Direction, Coldplay and Sam Smith - there is good news ahead for UK music fans, young people entering the music industry and for our wealth of talented UK artists.

But what is driving this resurgence in recorded music? – the growth in vinyl sales, in audio streaming channels such as Spotify, Apple Music and Tidal, in video streaming channels such as YouTube, and Vimeo?

While ‘music’ is the most searched-for term on YouTube, five times more popular than any other category, even ‘funny videos of pets’, UK radio listening is at an all-time high, reaching 48.7m listeners per week, with increased audience numbers for both public and commercial broadcasters.

Video streaming channels such as YouTube are not radio stations with moving images; they are the record collections for the mobile generation – catalogue music on the move. In other words, YouTubers listen to what they know; they don’t use video streaming services as a means to discover new music.

So where do music fans hear new music that makes a personal connection to them? Not on audio streaming playlists that are programmed globally.

Both national and local radio stations have the opportunity to break new artists and this has always been the strength in their programming – something familiar mixed with something unexpected; something old and something new.

As the music business model moves from one that sells units (a CD, a record, a download) to one that monetises a relationship with the consumer (through streaming, live, interactive media, broadcasting) the emerging artist needs a place to connect to audiences; to reach out to their future fans – and there is nothing like the reach of radio.

Yes, streaming may be the fastest growing means of music consumption in the history of the music industry but if you take radio out of the equation it is in danger of remaining a digital jukebox on endless repeat.

Radio remains the place to discover music.

[With thanks to UK Music, Rajar and BPI]